"Festing" Our Way to International Success in the War on Terrorism

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A previous set of ACG *News & Views* articles (May and June 2003) discussed the concept of "wicked" problems, first introduced in a 1973 paper by Rittel and Webber who argue that social policy is not amenable to solutions using "scientific" processes and analysis. The authors (professors of design and of city planning), argued that in social planning,

> there is no such thing as 'undisputable public good;' there is no objective definition of equity; policies that respond to social problems cannot be meaningfully correct or false; ...Even worse, there are no 'solutions' in the sense of definitive and objective answers.

They used the term "wicked" not in the sense of evil or ethically deplorable, but in the sense of being "vicious" or "tricky" or even "malignant." A wicked problem is ill defined, complex, and relies on "elusive political judgment for resolution." In contrast, a "tame" problem (which may still be complex) is

"...definable and separable and may have solutions that are findable." The global war on terrorism (WOT) is a wicked problem and as such requires innovative approaches. Even though the WOT is ill defined with no definitive formulation, at some point, the socio-political discussion has to be bounded to allow progress. The key seems to lie in processes that involve all interested stakeholders in developing workable solutions, recognizing that there is no end to the causal chains that link all the interacting open systems. The Cognexus Institute (*http://www.cognexus.org*) states the issue this way: "Problem wickedness demands collective intelligence . . . Understanding a wicked problem is about collectively making sense of the situation and coming to shared understanding about who wants what."

The Advanced Concepts Group is treating the WOT as a wicked problem that will require non-traditional solutions. Building on the concepts of Jamshid Gharajedaghi (*Systems

Thinking, Managing Chaos and Complexity, 1999, Butterworth-Heinemann), we realize that you must approach the human organization as a holistic, multiminded, purposeful system that does not display the conflict-resolving paternalistic figure common in traditional organizations. These systems generate high levels of conflict and their parts often disagree on both ends and means. Gharajedaghi also stresses that individual decision-making is not a process based only on rational thought, but it is also influenced by emotion and culture. The ACG has developed a process during which we hold "Fests" that we believe respects these complex social issues and furthers the

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development of thoughtful and rugged roadmaps for progress.

So what is a Fest? A Fest is a carefully structured brainstorm using large white boards to allow for written group brainstorming and small group breakouts for analysis and synthesis of results. The process steps through multiple phases, which typically include a problem-definition phase (Gharajedaghi's "formulating the mess"), an "idealized" solution development, an explicit listing of barriers and leverage points, and finally

the development of a path forward (or roadmap) with action items. We minimize presentations, allowing for the sharing of ideas through personal and small group interactions. The result is a rapidly moving, inclusive environment that involves those of differing personal styles (e.g., face-to-face vs. written communicator, analytic vs. expressive, amiable vs. driver). The large and complex picture that is created by the first phases is then focused by the group as they converge upon an agreed path forward. While not

everyone gets the solution they want, everyone leaves with an understanding of where the group is headed and how that decision was reached.

Working With International Allies on the Terrorism Problem

The war on terrorism is being fought around the world by both U.S. forces and by our allies. The Pacific region is of high concern in this war, where numerous active Islamic terrorist cells exist alongside U.S. interests and territories scattered throughout the region. In cooperation with an academic partner (the University of Hawaii's High Performance Computing Center) and a non-government organization (the East West Center's Pacific Disaster Center), the Advanced Concepts Group designed a Fest to focus on the creation of a technology roadmap for the war on terrorism based on the needs of the Pacific region. On October 22-24, 2003, about 40 experts involved in various aspects of homeland security from the United States and four other Pacific region countries met in Kihea, Hawaii, to engage in *PacFest*, which was designed to explore the role that technology could play in winning the war on terrorism in the Pacific region.

The result of this exercise was a characterization of the terrorism problem in the

Pacific region, emphasizing the issues unique to island nations in the Pacific setting, along with an action plan for developing working demonstrations of advanced technological solutions to these issues. In this approach, the participants viewed the problem and their potential solutions from multiple perspectives, and then identified barriers (especially social barriers) to any proposed technological solution. The final step created a roadmap for further action. This roadmap includes plans to:

1) create a conceptual monitoring and tracking system that would be "scale free," identify funding agencies, and develop a simple concept demonstrator;

2) pursue the development of a system to improve the local terrorism context information, perhaps through the creation of an information clearinghouse for Pacific law enforcement;

3) explore the creation of a pilot project around red teaming for Hawaii to feed the hypothesizer being explored by Sandia; and

4) share information concerning the numerous activities ongoing at various sites around the under-standing and modeling of terrorist behavior.

Our next planned endeavor is to again work with a NGO to plan an international fest focused on the North American continent. This

NorthAmFest will involve the U.S., Mexico, and Canada in an attempt to help bridge the cultural and historical barriers to cooperation that currently hinders cross-border efforts. We are exploring a partnership with the North American Institute (NAMI), a NGO whose mission is to "enhance public understanding of priority issues affecting the North American community. In pursuit of its mission, NAMI both serves as a convening organization by organizing conferences, workshops, and forums that address pertinent issues relating to the emerging North American community, and a program-oriented organization that works with the next generation of leaders in North America." A key U.S.

participant will be U.S. Northern Command (USNORTHCOM), the joint defense command with responsibility for homeland defense who will need to work closely with our border allies. The key issue is one of trying to develop a framework for the defense of North America (not just the U.S.) from terrorism. In addition to military representatives from the three countries, we will include law enforcement, academics, and business leaders in the process. The focus will most likely be on the technologies and processes that would comprise an effective system for the defense of North America.

So will it work? Can we help bridge all the language, cultural, and historical

barriers between these players? Do we really need their assistance in this war, or do we have it all well under control? Can we even get the right participants? Will the bureaucracies kill this effort before we can even give it a try? *PacFest* worked as well as it did because of a seeming sense of urgency by the key players. Pacific Command, our Pacific allies, local law enforcement, local academics, and the NGOs all seem to feel a real need to bridge these institutional barriers and work together for a solution. We believe that the *NorthAmFest* has a potentially large payoff and could help initiate the type of personal interaction necessary to build truly valuable cross-border alliances. ■

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Lies, Delusions, Secrets, Debates

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A couple of weeks ago, Gerry suggested a newsletter article on a subject that had been bothering him recently—namely, deception by public officials. He summarized his concern as follows:

Some government deceptions are meant for honorable purposes and may do some good (but may eventually have serious unintended and very harmful consequences), and others have no benefit except possibly to the liar. But I believe that deception has not been uncommon, and it is likely to continue to be important in the future, so there is value in thinking and sharing ideas about the role of deception.

As it happens, over 30 years ago I (then a newly minted assistant professor of political

science) wrote a book-length study of government deception. It centered on deception relating to the Vietnam War (the Pentagon Papers were just out), but it also looked more broadly at the underlying political, philosophical, and psychological issues. At Gerry's request, I dusted off the old manuscript and reviewed it for ideas that might go into the article he had in mind. What follows is the result.

Lies

Not surprisingly, the history of deception by political leaders goes back as far as the history of politics. Deception has frequently been justified by *raison d'état*—reasons of state. One "reason of state" is strategy: to gain an advantage over foreign

adversaries by deceiving them about your own intentions or capabilities. Interestingly, I could find very few instances of this kind of deception in the history of U.S. conduct of the Vietnam War. Indeed, even as the government was reassuring the home front that it was not planning to escalate the war, it was busy sending covert signals to North Vietnam that it was planning to do just that (in hopes of coercing the North into calling off the war). Better examples come out of World War II—as when the Allies took measures to hide the location of the impending Normandy invasion from Germany. Gerry thinks that the Strategic Defense

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Initiative (SDI) technology develop-ment was at least partly intended to intimidate the Soviet Union with the threat of impending, high-technology, U.S. strategic nuclear dominance. Although he has found many Soviet military leaders who stated in their writings that they believed in this threat, he hasn't found many of the U.S. officials involved in the SDI willing to confirm that interpretation.

A problem with strategic deception is that it usually also requires deceiving not only foreigners, but one's own people as well. This is usually thought to be the price paid for a higher good. But another *raison d'état* justification for deception is misleading the public for its own good. That is, political leaders may decide that a certain policy is right and necessary for the public welfare, but in order to carry out that policy, they must avoid opposition and win approval by dissembling about their actual motives and intentions. In 1947, the U.S. government decided that for geo-strategic reasons, to resist the spread of Soviet influence, it was necessary to supply military aid to authoritarian regimes in Turkey and Greece; the program—the Truman Doctrine—was presented to the public, however, more as economic aid to "free peoples" to preserve democracy against communism. (See Joseph Jones, *The Fifteen Weeks*.)

A third *raison d'état* justification for deception is

to preserve the control of state power of the persons or party believed most likely to best serve the public interest. If lies are necessary to conceal embarrassing mistakes or even unlawful actions taken in the national interest, then the lies are justified lest ammunition be given to political opponents who, if and when they come to power, will be bad for the country. One might think of the Iran-Contra affair in this category.

This third reason, however, starts to look like a slippery slope. The line between the public interest and the personal interests of politicians or bureaucrats holding on to positions of power gets very hard to draw. Most would argue, for example, that when President Nixon authorized and then attempted to cover up the Watergate burglary, he had crossed way over the line.
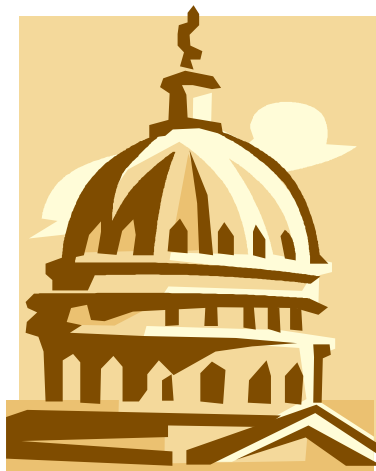
Delusions

This problem of "what did the President know and when did he know it" leads us into difficult territory. Nineteenth-century political philosopher, Jeremy Bentham, wrote an

instructive *Book of Fallacies* in which, among other things, he talks about the easy progression from "improbity" to "imbecility." When are political leaders fooling the public, and when are they deluding themselves? How does the leader himself know for sure where his own interests of self-preservation and advancement stop and the public interest begins?

But wait, it gets worse than that. Writing about his experiences in the Johnson White House, former presidential press secretary, George Reed, wrote about how a U.S. president is treated as royalty, with all around him working to support, defer to, and protect him. Criticism may be rare. All those within the inner circle feel that they have the best information and know what is best. (One might here think of the president who said that he doesn't read newspapers, but gets his information from "objective" sources—the advisors surrounding him).

Large bureaucracies—such as those composing the federal government—are also subject to internal self-delusion. My research suggested that this happened in parts of the Pentagon during the Vietnam War. (I reviewed the processes by which organization self-delusion can happen in my manuscript, but there isn't room here to discuss them.) Some (including me) would argue that the lack of Pentagon planning for the occupation of Iraq was caused partly by the delusion

that the Army would be welcomed as liberators and that Iraqis themselves would quickly restore order along lines favorable to U.S. interests. Now in the news, and soon to be investigated by an independent commission, is the apparent delusion developed in the entire U.S. intelligence community that Iraq possessed stockpiles of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and was close to acquiring nuclear weapons.

Secrets

Another old hobbyhorse of mine is government secrecy—of which I have long believed there is way too much. We tolerate secrecy in foreign policy because we feel that some military and diplomatic information would be so useful to our adversaries that we must keep it from them, even at the cost of keeping it from our own people. In this article, I am not going to get into the question of whether we err too far in the direction of

secrecy. I merely point out that the governmental secrecy apparatus, and the acquiescence by those not "in the know" to the judgments of those who are makes both intentional deception and governmental self-delusion considerably easier than they would be otherwise. It gives us guardians without guardians. It protects the inner circles from questions and criticism. In addition, those with secret information are frequently tempted to believe that it is truer information.

We'll have to see what the WMD investigation of the intelligence community learns (or, maybe we won't get to see what it learns), but apparently much of the community believed that its illusory secrets about Iraq were true. Interestingly, intelligence secrecy is justified because of the need to protect "sources and methods" from enemy disruption or exploitation. But what if those sources

and methods are producing illusions?

Anyway, all this is not to argue that secrecy is never justified, but only to point out that even when it is justified, there is a price to pay.

Debates

In rare cases, government deception may lead to "good" results—for example, making it easier to defeat Hitler. It can also lead to bad results. For example, whether U.S. claims about Iraqi WMD were intentionally deceptive or merely delusional, most of the rest of the world will not be making the distinction— the U.S. has been exposed as "lying" and will likely be trusted less. This cannot be helpful in our efforts to build international coalitions to combat terrorists. In addition, deception can undermine our democratic political system by treating citizens as objects of manipulation and by creating cynicism about what the government says and does. Deception can also lead to

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Iraq's Continuing Programs for Weapons of Mass Destruction

We judge that Iraq has continued its weapons of mass destruction (WMD) programs in defiance of UN resolutions and restrictions. Baghdad has chemical and biological weapons as well as missiles with ranges in excess of UN restrictions....

We judge that we are seeing only a portion of Iraq's WMD efforts, owing to Baghdad's vigorous denial and deception efforts. Revelations after the Gulf War starkly demonstrate the extensive efforts undertaken by Iraq to deny information. We lack specific information on many key aspects of Iraq's WMD programs.

Since inspections ended in 1998, Iraq has maintained its chemical weapons effort, energized its missile program, and invested more heavily in biological weapons....

Excerpts from an October 2002 **National Intelligence Estimate** *which were declassified on July 18, 2003 and presented at a White House background briefing on weapons of mass destruction in Iraq (http://www.fas.org/irp/cia/product/iraq-wmd.html).*

poor policies if they insulate decision-makers from reality.

An old political science professor of mine, the late Karl Deutsch, once wrote about the advantage of democratic systems over authoritarian ones:

> ...the institutionalization of dissent, and the provision of accepted channels and modes for the expression of criticism and self-criticism, of counterproposals and new suggestions, protect not merely the majority of yesterday but also provide potential growing points for the majorities of tomorrow. Taken together, majority rule, minority protection, and institutionalized dissent, reinforced by highly conscious, analytical, critical, and combinatorial modes of thought, provide Western societies and political systems with an unusually wide range of resources and instrumentalities for rapid social learning and innovation. *(The Nerves of Government)*

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Work and Play

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*O*nly a few generations ago, American life was largely about work and sustenance. Bread was not slang for money; it was literally what a working family had at the end of the day for its labor. A person woke up, ate, worked, ate, worked, ate, and slept. And often the work was providing for one's own food, water, shelter, and heat. Like other animals, our bodies, our minds, our perceptions, and our natural selection were ruled by the work we performed to survive and thrive.

Half of Americans now do white collar work, and an increasing portion of those are knowledge workers, who struggle to explain to their children what it is they *do* or show them what they built. For almost all of us, the links between sweat and income, and between our careers and our sustenance, are becoming less visceral and less direct. Food comes from restaurants, water and heat from pipes. Employers transfer money electronically to our bank accounts, which pay our utilities and mortgages automatically. It's hard to know what to do with those hunter/gatherer instincts anymore. (Maybe this explains the popularity of farmer's markets and garage sales).

For many of us, work for survival, the principal driver of the time and energy of every species since the dawning, is receding into the noise of our lives. (As we struggle to adjust, is it any wonder that depression is pandemic? Would it be any surprise to find that autism, Asperger's, Alzheimer's, and Attention Deficit Disorder have some of their roots in this transformation?)

The time and resources left after we have provided for our sustenance are, arguably, leisure. We tend to identify leisure with relaxing and doing little, but its original meaning is closer to "free time" or, more literally, "permission" or "license" (to do what one wants). By this definition, the vast majority of Americans today have ample leisure. They earn the money necessary to be warm and dry and fed; and then they earn some more; and they have both time and money leftover for other things.

How are we spending this surfeit now? How will we in the future? And what effect will it have on us as individuals, societies, and as a species?

I don't believe Americans are very good at leisure. Unlike the upper classes of Europe, Americans weren't raised for leisure. We don't

have many models of great and productive leisure-class lives, as the Europeans do in Galileo, Newton, the De Medicis, Mozart, Darwin, and the Bernoullis. And unlike the leisure classes of the last few centuries, most Americans work long hours at a full-time job. But fewer and fewer of us have done anything at work that our bodies or our "older" minds would recognize as work for survival. We have provided for our needs, but it doesn't feel like it. We are stressed and mentally tired, but we don't necessarily feel that we have been productive, alive, and useful. We have conflicting desires to relax and enjoy our "hard-earned" rest and to do something (at last) more visceral and natural.

What do we choose to do? Three trends in the U.S. are clear:

1) We are spending, not saving;

2) We are working at our jobs more (2000 hours a year and rising, while the rest of the First World is reducing work hours); and

3) We are spending vast amounts of time in "media use" (largely TV, movies, magazines, the internet, video games, radio and newspapers), which is predicted to reach an average of ten hours daily by next year.

I don't know if there is anything scarier to us than idle time. It is almost compulsory in our society to be busy (and even more necessary to claim to be so). I think this is largely our survival brains and bodies struggling with a lifestyle that doesn't suit them.

And one very common solution to the leisure problem is simply to work more. It is not at all clear that our increasing working hours are a product of economic necessity or a passion for the job. By continuing to spend whatever we make, we make our jobs seem more necessary. Perhaps, we work because our puritan roots make us think it is "good for us" and make us feel guilty when we stop, or perhaps we just don't know what else to do.

Another indication of our leisure inadequacy is the difficulty people have upon entering retirement, generally the moment we gain the most leisure time. According to one study, 41% of percent of retirees list retirement as the most difficult adjustment of their lives. The actual nature of retirement is changing rapidly with life expectancies and demographics, but our ideal still seems to be that retirement is a reward for thirty years of labor consisting of an extended golf vacation and a prescription drug benefit. We are supposed to "enjoy the good life," seemingly by not doing much living—and we might have to do this for twenty or thirty years.

Then there is entertainment, the largest and fastest growing leisure sink in the U.S. and the world. Having set the bizarre goal of trying to do nothing and have fun at the same time, Americans resourcefully invented movies, television, and the internet. This is all marvelously distracting, but it is hardly going to feed a hungry hippocampus. It is not that programming on television is really so bad; perhaps it is just a bad idea to spend vast amounts of time sitting our wired-for-survival brains down in front of a two-dimensional screen and hoping to be amused.

We have arrived at this state on the lightweight alloy wings of technology. Technology has enabled the productivity increases that yielded this surfeit of time and money. Technology has made the means for our survival (the provision of food, water, heat, etc.) largely invisible to us. And it has provided countless things to spend our excess money on and ceaseless entertainment for our excess time. Our fingers live at keyboards, steering wheels and remote control buttons, and we watch one screen or another (as you and I are both doing now) at work and at play most of the day.

And the result of all this is a reshaping of who we are.

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Dave Warner, a friend and co-conspirator of the ACG, calls this technology-evolution connection a "cybernetic loop"—evolving people create evolving technology, which in turn changes the nature of the people.

Natural selection criteria are surely changing as hunting and farming are superseded by hunting and pecking, pointing and clicking. It is far less clear now who is most likely to propagate their genetic material and why. Perhaps more important, we are learning the truth behind the thought that you are what you do. We now know that adult brains are quite plastic and adapt to our activities. A person who plays the piano will dedicate a great deal more brain space for finger representations. Video game players acquire increased visual acuity, etc. We are rewiring on the go in real time, all the time. And now

we are rewiring for a lot of things other than survival—white-collar work things, leisure things.

No one has much idea where the cybernetic loop will lead. Are we getting smarter or dumber? Is technology enabling us or becoming a crutch? How have we changed with calculus, FM radio, four-color charts, and Playstation? What is happening as we turn our bodies from crops to low-impact aerobics? And how will we relate to people still turning their minds to survival, their bodies to agriculture? And what will they think of us and how we spend our time?

What's clear is that we are remaking ourselves and being remade. There may be ways to grow our new brains and still keep the best of our old brains, to channel survival instincts into modern productive activities. Perhaps

virtual reality can turn knowledge worker problem solving into a dangerous jungle the average hippocampus can understand. Or maybe we have to choose (and have already chosen). Perhaps demographics, war, global warming, and an economic crisis will put the next generation back in survival mode. I don't know.

I do know that I spend a good part of my leisure cutting wood, chopping it up and making fires in the wood stove at home. It is time-consuming and messy and my chainsaw can be cranky. It doesn't save us much money, and it's very cold when we wake up in the morning. But most days I really like doing it. It is this thin shining tether in my life connecting sweat and sustenance, work and comfort. It appeals to my more primitive mind. (Anyway, it's better than Prozac.) ∎

"Americans are 'cowboys,' Europeans love to say. And there is truth in this. The United States does act as an international sheriff, self-appointed perhaps, but widely welcomed nevertheless, trying to enforce some peace and justice in what Americans see as a lawless world where outlaws need to be deterred or destroyed, often through the muzzle of a gun. Europe, by this Wild West analogy, is more like the saloonkeeper. Outlaws shoot sheriffs, not saloonkeepers. In fact, from the saloonkeeper's point of view, the sheriff trying to impose order by force can sometimes be more threatening than the outlaws, who, at least for the time being, may just want a drink."

Excerpt from the book, *Of Paradise and Power*, by Robert Kagan, pp. 35-36